



Coast Guard Flag Voice 17

JUNIOR ENLISTED WORKFORCE

CURRENT SITUATION

Our enlisted workforce deficit has drawn a lot of attention to our most junior (E2/E3) enlisted. Many units are short non-rated personnel and in turn these shortages are causing hardships as we attempt to get the work done with fewer people.

Our junior enlisted fulfill two important roles: they perform non-technical work (that civilian employees or contractors either cannot or should not do) and become rated and fill technical billet vacancies caused by RELADS, retirements and adding billets.

Balancing both roles becomes especially difficult because of the deficit. We have strived to fill a large majority of the rated billets with rated personnel, but with a significant impact on the non-rated workforce. To fill the rated billets with rated personnel promptly, we continue to advance a significant number of people each year, but from a smaller pool of people. This results in our non-rated personnel moving very quickly through their non-rated positions, thus enlarging the deficit in our non-rated workforce. We've been working to best manage this problem in the meantime as we build up our recruiting capability.

CGPC-epm has categorized our non-rated assignments, giving priority to afloat units and those ashore units where non-rated personnel either deploy or stand duty. Therefore, if we are short personnel, the vacancies will occur primarily in operational support or general support units. We also have greatly expanded our guaranteed "A" School program, permitting us to better fill "A" School quotas without pulling all our needs from operating units. This allows personnel to remain at their operating units somewhat longer; the time E2/E3s remain aboard directly depends on the number of petty officer advancement opportunities and number of non-rated E2/E3s in the field. Furthermore, we are approving requests to have civilians or contractors do work E2/E3 billets previously accomplished, especially non-"core" Coast Guard work (mowing lawns, handing out basketballs, etc.). Putting our junior enlisted in these types of jobs does nothing to encourage our new members to make the Coast Guard a career; we have precious few members we can afford to consider "expendable."

Hopefully you will soon see an improvement in the field. Our non-rated E2/E3 deficit has decreased from a beginning FY98 deficit of 935 to 730 on 30 Sep, and our non-rated personnel are staying in the field longer.

FUTURE SITUATION

The need for non-technical work is diminishing. Our new cutter classes require a smaller percentage of non-rated billets as crew. One example is the ice breakers: 39% of the enlisted billets on POLAR SEA and POLAR STAR are non-rated compared to only 7% on HEALY. Another example is the WLB: 42% on the 180 and 29% on the 225. If you think about the world of work, we can define only three levels of technical competence: Apprentice, Journeyman, and Master. Unless they are striking, non-rated personnel are not apprentices -- they have to at least get to "A" School. Moreover, today's Coasties are very different from those who entered our Service 20 or 30 years ago. Our new recruits' average age is 22-23 and quite a few have completed some college-level studies. Can we continue to afford to maintain a high percentage of unskilled labor who must transfer several times in a short period? Can we afford to treat our new, bright young people as unskilled labor?

In the future, I envision a smaller non-rated base and corresponding higher percentage of rated personnel. To prepare for this future, I am putting together a study team to look at managing our junior enlisted personnel more effectively. Membership will include staff from the Human Resources Directorate, the Personnel Command, the office of the Master Chief of the Coast Guard, and the affected programs. The team will address these two issues:

First, should we continue the current assignment system of recruit training to first unit to "A" School? If we do, then we need to determine how long non-rated personnel should remain at their first units and the correct number of billets needed to fill the rated demand. Consequently, we then can determine how much we can reduce this billet base.

Second, should we change the current assignment system and consider a system similar to the Navy's, where most junior enlisted personnel receive "A" School training before assignment to their first unit? What would be the resulting impacts? Could we substantially reduce the billet base?

What can we do now?

For starters...please look at your non-rated billets and evaluate whether civilians or contractors can perform some functions. I am seeing many successful conversions and hope for many more. Think creatively!

Continue to work with CGPC-epm. They have very successfully managed assigning non-rated personnel to the units with the highest need. Continue to articulate your needs and continue to understand their challenge.

Regards, FL Ames



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